



Stronger futures or stolen futures – Bishops and Religious question legislation

**Media Release
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The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference (ACBC) and Catholic Religious Australia (CRA) call upon all Federal Senators not to pass the legislation of the '*Stronger Futures Northern Territory 2011 Bill*'.

In their meeting today in North Sydney, Archbishop Philip Wilson and Sr Anne Derwin RSJ on behalf of the ACBC and CRA released the following statement:

"We join with the many Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians who have already urged the government to consult Aboriginal people and their Elders in planning actions and developing policies that will affect their lives for many years."

The ACBC and CRA are concerned that the *Stronger Futures Legislation* expands the powers of the current legislation and will be set in place for 10 years.

"We urge the Federal Government to abandon this legislation and develop strategies based on trust and respect which will promote collaboration with the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory in decision-making relating to their future", they said.

"The Northern Territory National Emergency Response has achieved some success and we can learn from these successes. We see this success particularly in housing, employment and education. However, the response is also the source of many problems. The legislation before the Senate extends many aspects of "the intervention" and continues to raise serious human rights concerns", they said.

The ACBC and CRA propose the development of an alternative response to the problems, based on consultation sensitive to Aboriginal culture.

"We need to listen to the Aboriginal people. They are asking for their rights as human beings and citizens of this country to be respected. Deep spiritual and cultural issues must be paramount in any legislation".

"Working in partnership with Aboriginal people over the long term – rather than 'quick fixes' – creates real changes that will continue."

"Social inclusion does not result from intervention, imposition, discrimination and exclusion. We call for an urgent shift from punitive controls to measures that restore community control, rebuild Aboriginal initiative and capacity, improve living conditions and show respect for Aboriginal languages and culture."

"The way forward needs to be principled, promoting self-determination, enabling participation in decision-making and ensuring free, prior and informed consent".

"Together, Australians can move towards a stronger future for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples", they said.

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